news

Edited by CAROL CLERK

RADIOHEAD PREVENT SUICIDE! OFFICIAL!

RADIOHEAD's Phil Selway was last week trying to help save lives – and telling how he's been doing so for the past 11 years, as a volunteer for The Samaritans.

It's the policy of The Samaritans for its volunteers to remain anonymous, and Selway had never previously publicised his long involvement with the organisation.

However, last week the Radiohead drummer broke cover at a press launch for the organisation's "Come Up" campaign, aimed at encouraging 15- to 24-year-olds to contact The Samaritans rather than doing anything more drastic when life seems unbearable. The importance of the campaign was underlined by shocking statistics disclosed by the organisation – which included the fact that two young people in the UK commit suicide every day, and one young person tries to take their own life every 30 minutes.

At the press launch in the Atlantic Bar in London's West End, Selway told The Maker: "Having been a Samaritan for the past decade or so, what I have been really impressed by is the care and patience I've seen in other volunteers. I think I would miss it if I wasn't a part of it now. Generally, in everyday life, you don't have the opportunity to talk to people on such an intimate level – especially people that are complete strangers to you. I find that very refreshing, and the fact that this kind of service is there is very important for people who haven't got anywhere else to turn.

"I've seen at first hand the difference that contacting The Samaritans can make to some people's lives. Listening, and listening effectively, can be quite lacking in our everyday encounters.

"We try to empathise with callers, and we try to guide rather than direct. Within that framework, a caller can end the conversation at any point they choose, so they're always in control of the call. People don't want to have your opinions or your values cluttering up their thought-processes, so we take a very non-judgemental stance.

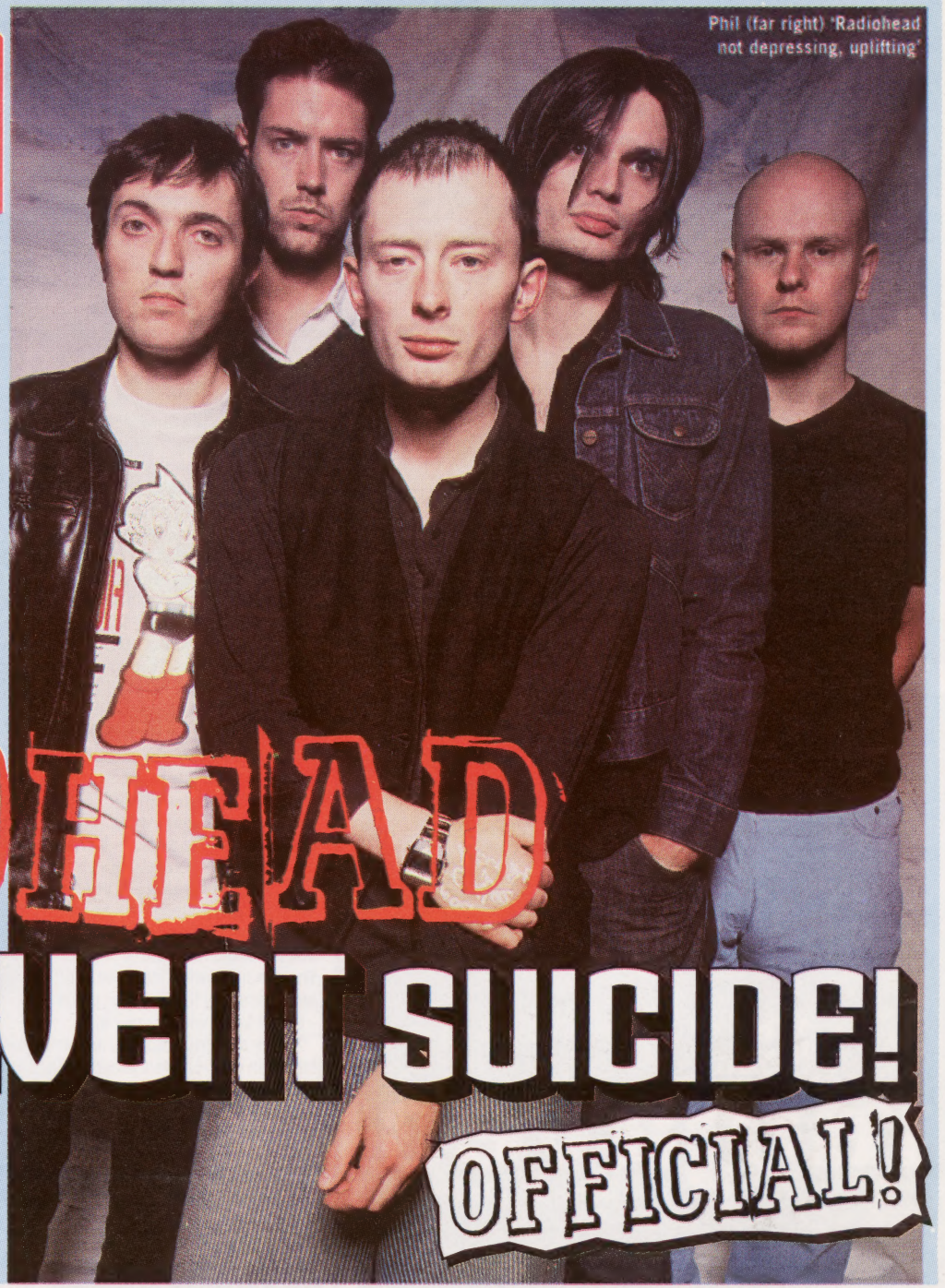
"We won't comment on whether we think, for instance, that somebody should have an abortion or not. We hope that by talking to us, people will ultimately find their own solutions."

Asked by The Maker if he saw any irony in his involvement in The Samaritans, an organisation dedicated to relieving despair, and the sombre nature of much of Radiohead's material, Selway replied: "We see Radiohead's songs not so much as depressing, but as uplifting. Cathartic. We tackle – or rather Thom tackles – very strong, emotional subjects, but at the same time, it's a process going through those feelings. It's a way forward, it can lead you somewhere much more positive and uplifting. Hopefully that's what people find when they come to The Samaritans."

Bedlam Ago Go appeared at the press launch to play their new single, "Asylum" – a song singer Leigh Kenny based on a letter he wrote to his mum after being admitted to the psychiatric wing of a hospital following a nervous breakdown he suffered when he was 22.

He said last week: "If I'd known about an organisation like The Samaritans at the time, I could've picked up the phone, and it could've made the situation slightly better. But when you're supposed to be a big man it can be hard to talk. If I'd talked to The Samaritans at the time, it might have stopped me getting tipped over the edge."

The Samaritans can be contacted on 0345-909090 for the price of a local call, via e-mail on jo@samaritans.org, or anonymously on samaritans@anon.twwells.com. They will also have tents at many of this summer's festivals.



Phil (far right) 'Radiohead not depressing, uplifting'